

**APROPOS THE PĀLI VINAYA AS A  
HISTORICAL DOCUMENT:  
A REPLY TO GREGORY SCHOPEN**

In an article on “The Stūpa Cult and the Extant Pāli Vinaya,”<sup>1</sup> Gregory Schopen argues that Theravādins once knew a *Vinaya* text different from that now available to us. The difference suggested by Schopen is not minor: his hypothesis is that the Pāli *Vinaya* once had rules regarding *stūpas*, just as the *Vinayas* of other Buddhist schools do. Obviously, if this provocative hypothesis is correct, it would have wide ramifications for our understanding of the Theravāda as a historical tradition. It could be the keystone for a new vision of the the social structure and practice of ancient Buddhist communities.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the promise of that new vision, and like Gregory Schopen, I feel that it has been too long in coming. However, I also find Schopen’s specific suggestion about the Pāli *Vinaya* to be untenable. Before giving reasons for this judgement, I would first like to acknowledge the continuing value of this paper for a student of Buddhism. Schopen’s article on the Pāli *Vinaya*, like so much of his work, combines a scepticism towards received ideas in scholarship and a keen ability to see new connections between scattered details. This is an exemplary combination that more often than not leads to a better understanding of the history of the Buddhist traditions. Moreover, this article offers, in the course of supporting the main suggestion about the “extant Pāli *Vinaya*,” many particular insights and recommendations for future research; these on their own make the article a valuable contribution to Buddhist historiography.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gregory Schopen, “The Stūpa Cult and the Extant Pāli Vinaya,” *JPTS*, XIII (1989), pp. 83–100.

## I

Schopen's argument that the Pāli *Vinaya* once contained rules regarding *stūpas* rests ultimately on the interpretation of a few passages in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* and the twelfth century monastic code (*katikāvata*) of Parākamabāhu I. Other important information documenting monastic participation in the *stūpa* cult as a matter of some ordinariness is offered as corroboration for the key textual interpretations, and indeed much of the article is devoted to this supporting material. All of this supporting material is relatively well-established,<sup>1</sup> in large part because of Gregory Schopen's own research, published elsewhere, and there is nothing about it that I would wish to gainsay. Valuable as this material is, it is still "circumstantial evidence" and alone it cannot confirm Schopen's hypothesis about the history of the *Vinaya* text.

In a curious way, however, some of Schopen's supporting material seems to turn on the main hypothesis itself, so much so that, in my view, the determinant interpretation of the different passages in the *Visuddhimagga* and the *katikāvata* consequently appears less credible. This subversion of the argument begins when Schopen notes that "if — as the *Mahā-Parākamabāhu Katikāvata*, the *Visuddhimagga*, and the *Sutta-Vibhaṅga* seem to suggest — the Pāli *Vinaya* originally contained such rules [regarding *stūpas*], then the fact that they are no longer found in the *Vinaya* known to us could, apparently, only be explained by

<sup>1</sup> See especially Gregory Schopen, "Burial 'ad sanctos' and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A Study in the Archeology of Religions," *Religion*, 17 (1987), pp. 207–25; Gregory Schopen, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, 10 (1985), pp. 9–47; and Gregory Schopen, "On Monks, Nuns and 'Vulgar' Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism," *Artibus Asiae*, XLIX (1988–89), pp. 153–68.

assuming that either they had inadvertantly dropped out of the manuscripts or, perhaps, were intentionally written out."<sup>1</sup> But having said this, Schopen then only gives reasons why neither of these assumptions can be seriously entertained.

By Schopen's own admission, the possibility that rules regarding *stūpas* were lost due to interruptions in textual transmission is unlikely. It is just too good to be true that all such rules, which we might best assume were scattered throughout the canonical text as is the case with other *Vinayas*, could have been lost by reason of accident alone.<sup>2</sup> Other evidence can be added to Schopen's reasoning about this unlikelihood. We should recall that the use of writing for the preservation of texts was a well-established feature of Theravādin monastic life by the time of Parākamabāhu's *katikāvata*. The *Mahāvamsa* records some occasions when kings sponsored the writing of canonical texts and then donated these copies to monasteries around Sri Lanka. Bhuvanekabāhu, for example, "caused all the three *Piṭakas* to be written by learned scribes of the Scriptures [*Dhammapothakalekhinaṃ*], rewarded them liberally and placed the copies in the diverse Vihāras of Laṅkā, and thus spread the Pāli scriptures throughout the land."<sup>3</sup> It strains all credibility even to consider that multiple "accidents of transmission" could afflict manuscripts scattered "throughout the land" so similarly, when even a single occurrence of such an accident is admitted to be unlikely. Moreover, it seems reasonable to expect that in a context where one collection of manuscripts was extensively damaged, some process of "textual

<sup>1</sup> Schopen, "Extant Pāli Vinaya," p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Schopen, "Extant Pāli Vinaya," p. 95: "it would be easy enough to see how some of these scattered rules could have been lost through accidents of transmission, but that all such rules would have been lost in this way seems very unlikely."

<sup>3</sup> Mhv 90:37–38, translation quoted from G.P. Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1928), p. 228. See also Mhv 45:3–4.

criticism" would correct whatever gaps had occurred, thus restoring at least a semblance of the original.

Schopen's alternative assumption — that the rules regarding *stūpas* were systematically removed — seems no more likely. Schopen himself provides abundant evidence that there could not have been any serious prohibition of monastic participation in the *stūpa* cult in the Buddhist communities of India and Sri Lanka before Buddhaghosa. There is also no evidence to indicate that this monastic participation was proscribed in the medieval period. Finally, we can add the fact of the numbers of *Vinaya* manuscripts and also manuscripts of the extensive commentarial literature associated with the *Vinaya*. To suggest that references to the rules regarding *stūpas* were systematically removed from so many duplicate manuscripts is to posit a preposterous conspiracy theory.<sup>1</sup> Conspiracies are notoriously difficult to establish, in courts of law and in scholarship; all too frequently the charge owes more to the preceptions of the accuser than to the facts themselves.

Thus both "explanations" of the hypothetical loss of rules regarding *stūpas* "raise many more questions than answers."<sup>2</sup> For me, then, Schopen's own support for his argument about the Pāli *Vinaya*

---

<sup>1</sup> Schopen seems to think that a careful examination of the *Samantapāsādikā* might confirm his hypothesis about an original Pāli *Vinaya*. I gather that he has in mind the possibility that the commentarial literature might display gaps in the *Vinaya* itself by preserving glosses and discussions of material now missing; see Schopen, "Extant Pāli Vinaya," p. 86, n. 9. My own cursory use of this commentarial literature makes me doubt that a discrepancy between text and commentary will be found to any degree more marked than with other commentaries. If such gaps were preserved in the *Vinaya* commentaries, I would expect Theravādin literature to address their source, in a manner analogous to Jaina acknowledgement of the loss of their original scriptures; the lack of such an acknowledgement is of course not conclusive, but merely contrasting "circumstantial evidence."

<sup>2</sup> Schopen, "Extant Pāli Vinaya," p. 95.

provides sufficient reason to reconsider whether his interpretation of the passages from the *Visuddhimagga* and Parākramabāhu's *katikāvata* is indeed correct.

## II

If Schopen's argument about the Pāli *Vinaya* depends in the end on his interpretation of a limited number of passages, his interpretation of these passages depends on his understanding of an single term, *khandakavatta*. These passages associate, by juxtaposition at the very least, duties (*vattāni*) pertaining to *stūpas* and *bodhi* trees with other specific observances called collectively *khandakavattāni*. On the crucial point of this term's reference, Schopen is somewhat tentative, admitting that his interpretation depends on the correctness of other scholars' work.

Following the lead of standard dictionaries and translations, Schopen glosses *khandakavattāni* as "duties specified in the *Khandaka*," with the further possibility that they refer to the observances enumerated in the *Vattakkhandaka* portion of the *Vinaya*.<sup>1</sup> Impressively, this gloss is said to agree with that of the great *ṭīkācariya* Sāriputta, although Sāriputta's own interpretation comes at second-hand from a footnote in Ratnapala's translation of the *Mahā-Parākramabāhu Katikāvata*.

While this translation of *khandakavatta* is obviously plausible for lexical purposes, it is still too general to bear the weight it must, if it is to be the *sine qua non* of Schopen's hypothesis.

Some further specificity is provided by Sāriputta himself, in a discussion of *khandakavattāni* found in his *Vinaya ṭīkā*, the *Sāratthadīpanī*. The textual occasion for this discussion is Buddhaghosa's

---

<sup>1</sup> Schopen, "Extant Pāli Vinaya," p. 85.

reference to fourteen *khandakavattāni* and eighty-two *mahāvattāni* in the *Samantapāsādikā*; significantly Buddhaghosa is not commenting on any monastic practices at this point, but is elaborating the means by which the *saddhamma* may be preserved<sup>1</sup>; it may be that in such a context Sāriputta would have been guided more by scriptural precedent than by the patterns of practice of his day and this discussion may then be a good reflection of the *Vinaya* he knew. The *Sāratthadīpanī* passage reads:

*cuddasa khandakavattāni nāma vattakkhandake vuttāni āgantuka-vattaṃ āvāsika-gamika-anumodana-bhaddagga-piṇḍa-cārika-ārañṇaka-senāsana-jantāghara-vaccakuṭi-upajjhāya-saddhivihārika-ācariya-antevāsikavattan ti imāni cuddasa vattāni. Tato aññāni pana kadāci tajjanīyakammakatādikāle yeva caritabbāni dve-asīti mahāvattāni. na sabbāsu avatthāsu caritabbāni. tasmā cuddasakkhandakavattesu agaṇitāni.*<sup>2</sup>

This may be translated:

“The fourteen *khandakavattāni* are those fourteen observances described in the *Vattakkhandaka* such as the observance pertaining to guest monks, to resident monks, and to monks going away, pertaining to giving thanks, to the refectory, to the collecting of alms, to the forest-dwellers, and to the lodging place, to the bathroom and to the latrine, to the preceptor, the co-resident, the teacher, and the pupil. Then the other eighty-two *mahāvattāni* are those which are to be practiced only at the appropriate time, as, for example, the act of censure was done, and are not to be practiced in all stages of life. Therefore they are not counted in the fourteen *khandakavattāni*.”

<sup>1</sup> Sp 225, glossing *saddhammaṭṭhitiyā*.

<sup>2</sup> Sāriputta, *Sāratthadīpanī nāma Vinayaṭīkāya* (Bangkok: Mahamakuta Rajavidyalaya, B. E. 2513), Vol. 2, p. 54.

This single passage provides sufficient evidence to doubt that Buddhaghosa and Sāriputta knew a *Vinaya* markedly different from the one we now have. First, Sāriputta employs conventional numbers in discussing the monastic observances. The idea of fourteen *vattāni* goes back to the *Vinaya* itself, as does the identification of each specific observance.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this enumeration and identification are found in a “key” at the end of the *Vattakkhandaka*, and it could be argued that this section itself is a late addition to the *Vinaya* text. Buddhaghosa does not comment on this key, but the idea of fourteen *vattāni* was certainly known to him, as he employs it at various places in his commentaries.<sup>2</sup> A reference to fourteen *vattāni* is also found in the *Jātaka*.<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that the number of *vattāni* appears conventionally fixed, while the collective name for these observances is not. In the *Samantapāsādikā*, Buddhaghosa speaks of fourteen *khandakavattāni* and eighty-two *mahāvattāni* as well as eighty-two *khandakavattāni* and fourteen *mahāvattāni*.<sup>4</sup> In his *Vibhaṅga* commentary, Buddhaghosa speaks of fourteen *mahāvattāni* and eighty-two *khuddakavattāni*,<sup>5</sup> a usage which is directly consonant with Ratnapala’s identification of major and minor duties in the *Khandaka*. This numerical consistency and terminological interchangeability continued in Sāriputta’s time. For example, another *ṭīkā* on the *Vinaya*, the *Vajirabuddhiṭīkā*, contemporary with the *Sāratthadīpanī*, glosses a reference to the fourteen *mahāvattāni* as *āgantuk’-āvāsika-gamik’-ānumodana-bhaddagga-piṇḍacārik’-ārañṇaka-*

<sup>1</sup> Vin II 231. A glance at the Devanāgarī edition of the *Cullavagga* indicates that on this point there are no variants among the Roman, Burmese, and Sinhalese editions; see *Cullavagga*, edited by Bhikkhu J. Kashyap (Nalanda: Devanagari Pali Series, 1956), p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> See Sp 225, 874, 1378; Vbh-a 297.

<sup>3</sup> Ja I 449.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Sp 225 with Sp 415.

<sup>5</sup> Vbh-a 297.

*senāsana-jantāghara-vaccakuṭi-upajjh' -ācariyasaddhi-vihārik' -antevāsika-vattāni*, an identification that is the same as Sāriputta's for the *khandakavattāni*.<sup>1</sup> This deserves emphasis. Both the idea of fourteen vattāni and the identification of specific observances is consistent, and in this conventional list of fourteen there is no room for practices connected with *cetiyas* or *bodhi* trees.

The latter practices cannot be included among the eighty-two other observances noted by Sāriputta. The eighty-two *mahāvattāni* are not done daily, but only as circumstances demand. This contrast is made very clear in yet another *Vinaya* *ṭikā* from the same period, the *Vimativinodanī*:

*etāni (i.e. imāni cuddasavattāni) ca sabbesaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ sabbadā ca yathārahaṃ caritabbāni. dve-asīti mahāvattāni pana tajjanīyakammatādikāle yeva caritabbāni, na sabbadā, tasmā visuṃ gaṇitāni ...*<sup>2</sup>

"These are to be done by all monks every day as is appropriate. The eighty-two *mahāvattāni* are to be done at the proper time, as for example the act of censure was done, not every day, and therefore they are taken individually ... "

<sup>1</sup> *Vajirabuddhiṭikā* (Bangkok: Bhumbalo Bhikkhu Foundation Press, 1980), Vol. 2, p. 393. See as well the twelfth century Sinhala glossary, the *Jātaka Aṭṭva Gāthapadaya*, edited by Ven. Māda uyangoḍa Vimalakirti (Colombo: Gunasena, 1961), p. 114: *cuddasa mahāvattesu, āgantuka vata āvāsika vata bhaktāgra vata senāsana vata jantāghara vata vaccakuṭi vata upadhyāya vata anumodanā vata piṇḍapāti vata ārañṇaka vata saddhivihārika vata antevāsika vata yanādi vuttadus mahāvathida; asītikhandakavattesu ca, tajjanīyādi ṭi karma kaḷa kālayehida parivāsādi kālayehida paryiayutuvū devisi kanduvat ādivū asūmaha kanduvatehida*. This last explanation clearly echoes Sāriputta's comment on the eighty-two *mahāvattāni* translated above.

<sup>2</sup> Coliya Kassapa, *Vimativinodanī*, edited by Beratuduwe Dhammadhara Tissa Thero (Colombo: H. Gabriel de Silva, 1935), p. 89.

We have evidence that the observances for *cetiyas* and *bodhi* trees were counted among those to be done daily,<sup>1</sup> which might also explain why they were juxtaposed with the fourteen *vattāni*. It hardly seems plausible that they would be grouped with the other eighty-two *vattāni*, since they do not fit within the definition of those observances, even though the larger number would make their inclusion easier. It thus seems more than likely that Buddhaghosa, Sāriputta, and the other *ṭikācariyas* did not include the observances concerning *stūpas* and *bodhi* trees among the observances specified in the *Vinaya* itself.

The individual passages discussed by Schopen require some further comment. It may be that Ratnapala's translation of a key line in the *Mahā-Parākramabāhu Katikāvata*, while in general correct, is misleading in a crucial respect. Schopen gives emphasis to the line in question when he quotes the passage: "the duties specified in the *Khandaka* such as the duties pertaining to *Stūpas*, . . . the teachers . . .," etc. Ratnapala, however, omitted in his translation a *du*, "also" which, if included would give: "the duties specified in the *Khandaka*, such as the duties pertaining to teachers, etc., as well as the duties pertaining to *stūpas* and the shrines of the *bodhi* tree."<sup>2</sup> This would seem to be a clear example of juxtaposition, rather than inclusion in a fixed list.

<sup>1</sup> For example, the *Heranāsikhavinisa*, a twelfth century commentary to a handbook of *Vinaya* rules for novices referred to in the *Mahā-Parākramabāhu Katikāvata* (see Ratnapala, pp. 130, and 192, n. 8.1) explicitly says that these observances are to be done every day; an edition of this work is found in *Sikhavalanda hā Sikhavalanda Vinisa*, edited by Māda uyangoḍa Vimalakirti (Colombo: Gunasena, 1970), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Ratnapala apparently also misconstrued *dahagab māṃbo aṅgaṇa-vatu-du* as three observances, rather than two, as is suggested by the *Visuddhimagga* passages discussed by Schopen. I know of no other reference where observances specifically focused on "temple terraces" are specified.

The *Visuddhimagga* passages are more difficult to explain. My only suggestion is that *Khandakavattāni*, which we have already seen is not strictly a technical term, may have had an even broader field of reference. Perhaps it grouped a range of practices according to their family resemblances, rather than by their common origin in specific parts of the *Vinaya*.

### III

At the end of his article, Schopen seems to anticipate alternative interpretations of *khandakavattāni*, and he offers another implication of his research and discussion:

“If this interpretation is not correct, and if the Pāli *Vinaya* did not contain rules, then it either could not have been the *Vinaya* which governed early Buddhist monastic communities in India, or it presents a very incomplete picture of early and actual monastic behaviour and has — therefore — little historical value as a witness for what we know actually occurred on a large scale at all of the earliest monastic sites in India that we have some knowledge of.”<sup>1</sup>

These comments raise questions of a completely different order about the Pāli *Vinaya* as a historical document and I would like to conclude this reply with a response to them.

We are all well aware that there is a vast and intimidating literature associated with the *Vinaya*. This literature does, however, make it clear that Theravādins found the *Vinaya* both too little and too much. They found it too little in so far as the canonical text required elucidation and clarification, and as a result, massive commentaries and

<sup>1</sup> Schopen, “Extant Pāli Vinaya,” p. 100.

glossaries were written on it; we have been using some of these in the course of this discussion. They found it too much in so far as the size of the canonical *Vinaya* made it unwieldy and they consequently wrote diverse summaries and compendiums, including Buddhadatta’s *Vinaya-vinicchaya* and Sāriputta’s *Muttaka-Vinaya-vinicchaya*. Such works were written to present the *Vinaya*’s practical message in a more manageable fashion. In a similar vein, handbooks like the *Khuddasikha*, *Mulasikha*, *Herāṇasikha*, and indeed the *katikāvatas* themselves were written to provide even more practical guidance. This associated literature makes relating the canonical *Vinaya* to actual practice in diverse contexts more complex than has generally been admitted by students of Buddhism.

The supporting evidence concerning the routine participation of monks in the *stūpa* cult, which Schopen considers in the course of developing his main hypothesis, clearly indicates that the *Vinaya* does not address every aspect of Buddhist monastic life.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean, however, that it consequently has little historical value.

Schopen may be right, I think, to suggest that the canonical *Vinaya* text is not as useful as once thought as a ready source for extracting usable historical data. For this, archeological evidence and the evidence found in the different monastic handbooks may give more accurate answers to our questions. Even so, reconstructing the general historical context of early Buddhist monasticism may ultimately depend on the extent to which we can penetrate the thought-world of the larger texts, and especially the canonical *Vinaya*.

<sup>1</sup> Schopen (“Extant Pāli Vinaya,” p. 98) holds T.W. Rhys Davids up for criticism for saying that the Pāli *Vinaya* “enters at so great length in all (Schopen’s emphasis) the details of the daily life of the recluses.” Perhaps we may excuse Rhys Davids’ hyperbole; he was, after all, describing a text which contains rules against building a fire to smoke out those who take too long in the latrine.

An important historical value of the canonical *Vinaya* lies in its being a coherent expression of a particular Buddhist *mentalité*. It will only be after we have learned how to combine our interest in “what really happened” with a sensitivity to the changing thought-worlds of the Therāvada that we will begin to discern the historical reality behind the literary and archeological traces of ancient Buddhist monasticism.

Chicago

Charles Hallisey

## A NOTE ON DHAMMAPĀLA(S)

Of the works ascribed by tradition<sup>1</sup> to Dhammapāla, the *Paramatthamañjūsā* (*Visuddhimagga-mahā-ṭīkā*, abbr. Vism-mhṭ) and the *ṭīkā*s on the first three *nikāyas* (that on the *Aṅguttara* having presumably disappeared by the time of Sāriputta in the twelfth century) are usually assumed to be by the same author, referred to as Dhammapāla II: e.g., Mr Norman writes:<sup>2</sup>

“In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that the Gandhavaṃsa is correct in stating that the *ṭīkā*s to the Visuddhimagga and the four *nikāyas* are by the same person.”

Some authors follow tradition in identifying this author with the author of the *Paramatthadīpanī*, referred to by others as Dhammapāla I.

Near the beginning of Vism-mhṭ occurs the following passage:<sup>3</sup>

*etth’ āha “kasmā panāyaṃ Visuddhimagga-kathā vatthu-pubbikā āraddhā, na Satthu-thomanāpubbikā ?” ti. vuccate “visuṃ asaṃvaṇṇanādibhāvato”: Sumaṅgalavilāsini-ādayo viya hi Dīghanikāy’-ādīnaṃ nāyaṃ visuṃ saṃvaṇṇanā, na pakaraṇantaraṃ vā Abhidhammāvatāra-Sumatāvatār’-ādi viya;*

<sup>1</sup> E.g. *Gandhavaṃsa*, ed. J. Minayeff, *JPTS* 1886.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, vol. VII *Buddhist and Jaina Literature*, fasc. 2 *Pali Literature*, including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of all Hīnayāna Schools of Buddhism, K. R. Norman, 1983, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Buddhaghosācariya’s *Visuddhimagga* with *Paramatthamañjūsāṭīkā* of Bhadantācariya Dhammapāla, ed. [in Nāgarī] Dr Rewatadhamma, vol. I, 1969, Pāli-Granthamālā 3, Varanasi, p. 2.